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SENSITIVE
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PARIS FOR RKANEDA
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SUBJECT: PESSIMISM STILL THE ORDER OF THE DAY FOR NORTHEASTERN CAR

REF: 09 BANGUI 114

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On June 21, 2009, Birao, Central African Republic (CAR) was attacked for the second time in a month as Kara tribe gunmen and the Goula tribe and Central African Military (FACA) defenders of the town battled for supremacy. This follows a similar attack on Birao on June 6 (BANGUI 114) accelerating the worrying spiral of violence in Northeastern CAR that has left at least thirty dead among the attackers, defenders, and civilians. While the Kara have been the traditional rulers of Birao for over one hundred years, their militancy is a new development and they may be making a push to secure military and political victories before the rains shut down movement until November. Despite a peace commission sent to Birao, and an apparent ceasefire deal reached, Post worries that the Central African Government (CARG) has neither the military/political capacity, nor the will, to take control of the area and the issue. Furthermore, we do not believe that MINURCAT has the mandate or anywhere near the force necessary to play a decisive role. The humanitarian consequences may be dire.
END SUMMARY

Birao Half Empty, A ``New Rebel'' Formed

¶2. (SBU) The June 21 assault on Birao was perpetrated by the same Kara armed group that attacked the town on the June 6 and has recently announced that it is named the Union of the Democratic Movements for Unity (UMDR). This group is a function of an internal split in the Kara community of the Vakaga and should be noted that it is not a rebel group in the traditional sense but it rather a movement of tribal vengeance fused with local political brinksmanship. The former Mayor of Birao, Ahmed Mustafa, appears to be using a simmering tribal conflict between the Goula and Kara based on revenge killings to gain a political advantage over a fellow Kara, and most recent mayor of Birao, Abdurrahman. While there is certainly an ethnic flavor to the violence, the direction of the fighting - away from the Goula villages south of Birao and toward to mixed ethnicity city itself - suggests the fighting has more than ethnic score settling behind it. According to multiple sources, Mustafa and Abdurrahman have been competing for supremacy of the city (which controls the vital link to Sudan through which all goods to the

Vakaga pass) for at least a year. Recently, Abdurrahman called in members of the UFDR (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity and a majority Goula group) to protect his interests in the city and UMDR attacked those forces as a reaction. Further evidence in support of this thesis is that the Kara communities who support Abdulrahman remain in Birao while those that support Mustafa/UMDR have fled. Thus, while the Kara and the Goula have legitimate grievances against each other, an essentially village against village polemic is being used by Birao politicians to further their political agendas.

¶3. (SBU) On June 22, the UFDR announced the pullout of its forces, though about ten fighters remain to care for wounded at the local hospital. This suggests two things:

-- The Goula leadership does not feel the price they are paying to protect Abdurrahman is worth the punishment it has taken, and,

-- The UFDR may be fracturing and the consolidation is a move by the leadership in Tiringoulu to keep a closer eye on their elements.

As postulated in BANGUI 114, UFDR leaders in the Ouanda Djalle area have reportedly split from Damane's control and have threatened to take up arms against the government and/or the Kara. Post has yet to see a manifestation of this, but it is none the less very worrying.

¶4. (SBU) The pull out of Birao by the UFDR has a number of distressing elements to it:

-- The UFDR is the last remaining element of order in the city. The FACA is incapable/unmotivated and law

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enforcement/peacekeeping is out of MINURCAT's rules of engagement (NOTE: The start of the Togolese force's mandate has been ``catastrophic'' according to one NGO. They deployed to Birao without any ammunition, setting back the mission some critical days. Additionally, on June 21, they returned to base when faced with the firefight in the town instead of ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers in Birao as is their charge). Worse, the specter of ethnic strife also looms as accounts are settled from previous violence.

-- Multiple sources have now confirmed that elements of Sudanese Kara/Ta'asha have joined those already in the CAR in the two attacks on Birao. Multiple sources also claim that among them are horseback mounted warriors who are said to ``Janjaweed''. It is impossible to tell at the moment if this is a pseudonym for Sudanese warriors on horseback in general (the opinion of the Sudanese Ambassador in Bangui) or if these are same Janjaweed of Darfur notoriety who have come to the CAR for loot. What is certain is that there are figures that are profiting from the lawlessness and conflict to pillage and steal from the surrounding area.

-- The precarious security situation in Birao will lead to obvious humanitarian fallout. As it stands now, an NGO on the ground estimates that half of the town's population has fled and that there are 1,000 displaced (IDPs) in the immediate area. The IDPs are almost exclusively Kara who sought refuge after reprisal attacks were made upon them by Birao's other inhabitants.

-- Furthermore, due to the panic created by the violence, it is feared that farmers in the area will not be able to plant their crops during the rainy season and that a food shortage is likely in 2010. This was confirmed to POLOFF during a UN sponsored trip to Birao on July 2, 2009. Additionally, humanitarian workers confirm that they have already distributed food aid meant to last until November. This has created concerns that as inhabitants know there is food in humanitarian worker's care; residents of Birao may turn against those workers if food becomes too scarce.

¶5. (SBU) A delegation lead by CAR Minister of the Interior Queifio, visited Birao on July 2, 2007 and is said to have secured a ceasefire. He gave 4 million CFA (8,700 USD) in blood money to the Kara to quell the violence and both sides have agreed to an arbitrated solution. Mediation efforts are allegedly to be headed by President Bozize, but no date has been set for his trip to Birao. (N.B. the Ambassador has long urged President Bozize to engage personally, base on the recommendations made by the Sultan of Ndele during the Ambassador's visit to that city in February, 2009.) A Prefet has been sent from Bangui and he will act as both Prefet and Mayor until elections are held in March. Regardless, until mediations are begun and elections are held, both sides will remain armed and apprehension will reign. The displaced Kara have not yet returned from the bush, and until Post sees this, we will not be comfortable making an optimistic prognostication of peace in the area.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT Post still maintains that the worst of the violence is likely to come after the rains. The evolving situation in Birao and the prospect of further violence in Ndele (SEPTEL) pose two major problems for the CAR:

-- The rains and continued violence will block any large scale humanitarian aid to an already remote area. Further violence will only exacerbate the already critical humanitarian situation in the CAR overall, setting back development in this desperately poor country.

-- The next months are crucial in the CAR considering that preparations for elections, called for by March/April 2010, are already behind schedule. Continued instability and a perceived threat from the north will either distract the CARG from the task at hand, or worse, give it a convenient excuse to postpone the ballot. As previously stated, it is expected that the

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President personally mediate the Kara/Goula conflict and if he fails to do so, the Vakaga risks being subject to continued conflict.

Post believes that, given the CARG's lack luster efforts at peacemaking and its military's lack of capacity, pessimism is still the order of the day. The CARG has, thus far, displayed very little political acumen or leadership, especially in the Vakaga. We fear that the grievances in the north, which go back at least a decade, will likely fester through the rainy season and will, unless addressed with unseen good faith, engulf the region yet again before the end of 2009. END COMMENT
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